Assignment #2

THE TEXT-IN-CONTEXT ESSAY

English 101: Sections 121 & 135
Instructor Sung Ohm
Fall 2004

The purpose of this assignment is to make you more capable researchers—ones that know how to understand a particular subject (especially as pertaining to academia) and enter into the conversation in a critical and well-informed manner. The research component is designed for you to find out how your topic is being discussed by academics and other experts in a field of study. And once you begin to grasp the "academic conversation" (*vis-à-vis* your research), you will enter into the conversation dialectically (as opposed to polemically).

This assignment requires you to build on the close reading strategies and critical textual analysis skills you used in the first essay, adding a new layer: context analysis. You will examine secondary works that provide contexts through which you can better understand the primary text—in this case, the *Communist Manifesto*. These secondary texts should provide information to establish historical background, biographical information about the writer, and/or views of academic scholars. The essay should make strong supportable claims about the primary text and be supported by references to secondary materials. Thus the topic of the essay will connect some aspect of context in which the text was written or has been examined to your interpretation of that primary text; in other words, you will both analyze the text ***and*** directly discuss its place in its context.

You will also be asked to do focused research. As such, the emphasis will be on using a few sources correctly and effectively more than on finding many sources. The practice of research and argumentation will enable you to consider the text in relation to other materials, instead of in isolation. Ultimately, the purpose of the research is to illuminate something in the text for you and your readers.

Elements of the Assignment

To help you research this essay, you will be required to write a short *research proposal* that draws upon your readings in this course and an *annotated bibliography.*

Proposal: The proposal is a way for you to begin the research process as well as a way for you to articulate your own interests in this project. In other words, the proposal allows you to create or negotiate the assignment according to your own interests. You may want to begin by asking *critical questions* that may lead you to refine your topic even more. Remember this essay is relatively short for a research paper so a more focused topic will serve you better. I strongly encourage you to ask questions rather than state a position at this point. You may want to begin by creating a *thesis question*: something you plan on investigating. Begin with some preliminary investigation by looking at two sources (at the very least). *You must get approval of your topic before the final proposal is due and you move on to drafting the essay.* [1-2 pages].

Annotated Bibliography: The annotated bibliography includes short summaries of the sources you may possibly use, and it allows you to organize and to analyze your various sources. As I stated in class, you may not use all the sources you have listed on your annotated bibliography. The bibliography reflects the experts from which you have chosen to draw. It also reflects the quality of your research so choose your experts wisely. Lastly, the bibliography is also a way to share your information with others, especially if you are working collaboratively. [5-8 sources].

Text-in-Context Essay: The essay will be the accumulation of the knowledge you've acquired on your topic. Here you will take a critically and ethically informed position—an academic argument. Working with claims, evidence, and discussions, you will persuade your readers that you have a legitimate and credible position. Rather than merely summarizing the experts, you will offer your readers your own "interpretive lens" that is informed by the "experts"—i.e. your research. [4-8 pages, standard academic format (MLA format)].

Contexts:
Context is defined as any factors or influences surrounding a text. A text may be a written work but also a film, event, or situation. Contexts shape the way people view or understand a work or happening. You will choose from the following three contexts: historical, biographical, and contemporary contexts. These are large general areas of study and you will select a particular topic within that area.

Options for the* Communist Manifesto*:

1. *Historical Context*: Trace the historical climate of the times in which Marx and Engel were writing. For example, think of the disillusionment of the Industrial Revolution as one of the contexts for *The Communist Manifesto.* Other topics include (but are not limited to): Marx within the rhetoric of the Enlightenment Era, Marx's conception of historical material and/or dialectic materialism, Marx and "true" democracy, etc. Choose a specific historical focus rather than attempting to cover a series of different historical events; a more focused paper will make for a stronger and more persuasive paper. The historical research should illuminate something about the text. Remember to go back to the primary text to prove your interpretations.

2. *Biographical Context*: Of course, you may already have noticed that the biographical will overlap with the historical. However, for the biographical context, focus more directly on Marx and Engels' life and what influenced him to write what he did—i.e. *The Communist Manifesto*. Deciding what is relevant information to his life will depend on what your focus and purpose for this assignment will be. Avoid discussing all of Marx's or Engels' life chronologically (remember, this paper is relatively short); rather, find ways to focus your paper on specific events as they pertain to the writing or content of the *Manifesto*.

3. *Comparative Contemporary Context:* Choose one of the specified contemporary academic articles on the course website (I will note which ones will work for this assignment in class). Compare how Marx and Engel's views in the *Manifesto* are still relevant in the contemporary article's analysis; in other words, examine how the article is using "Marxist" concepts even though they do not necessarily directly refer to Marx and Engels or the *Manifesto.* The article on the website will serve as a jumping point and give you a direction for your research. Research the subject matter of the chosen article to find materials to support it. Frame your research by looking at the connections between *The Communist Manifesto* and contemporary works in sociology, political economics, class studies, race and ethnic studies, women's studies, or other such fields and domains. Work between the texts. Look at the intersections between the works. Explore how contemporary academic articles further develop the conversation that Marx and Engel's began in the *Manifesto*. The *Communist* Manifesto will still be the primary text, but your research will look at how Marx and Engels' analysis continues to influence contemporary social analyses. Stronger papers will find specific focus within the larger topic (i.e., try to find ways to narrow your topic). Make sure you go refer back to the primary text and cite you secondary sources to substantiate your reading of the primary texts.